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# THE JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW

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## THE RABBINICAL CONCEPTION OF HOLINESS.

THE conception of holiness in the Rabbinic literature is rather complicated, being a composite of various aspects not easily definable, and at times even seemingly contradictory. But diverging as the ideals of holiness may be in their application to practical life, they all originate in Israel's consciousness of its intimate relation to God, which is, as I have endeavoured to show in many places in this REVIEW<sup>1</sup>, the central idea of Rabbinic theology. In fact, in its broad features, holiness is but another word for *Imitatio Dei*, a duty dependent upon Israel's close contact with God. "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy" (Lev. xix. 2). These words are explained by the ancient Rabbinic sage Abba Saul to mean "Israel is the *familia* (suite or body-guard) of the King (God), whence it is incumbent on them to imitate the King<sup>2</sup>." The same thought is expressed in different words by another Rabbi, who thus paraphrases the verse from Leviticus which has just been cited. "Ye shall be holy, and why? because I am holy, for I have attached you unto me, as it is said, 'For as the girdle cleaves to the loins of a man, so I have caused to

<sup>1</sup> See JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, vols. VII and VIII.

<sup>2</sup> *Sifra*, 86 c. Cp. Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, II, 367, and Lewy, *Ueber einige Fragmente aus der Mischna des Abba Saul*, p. 23.

cleave unto me the whole house of Israel' " (Jer. xiii. 11)<sup>1</sup>. Another Rabbi remarked, "God said to Israel, Even before I created the world you were sanctified unto me; be ye therefore holy as I am holy;" and he proceeds to say, "The matter is to be compared to a king who sanctified (by wedlock) a woman unto him, and said to her: Since thou art my wife, what is my glory is thy glory, be therefore holy even as I am holy<sup>2</sup>." In other words, Israel having the same relation to God as the *familia* to the king, or as the wife to the husband, or as children to the father<sup>3</sup>, it follows that they should take him as their model, imitating him in holiness.

Before proceeding to some analysis of this *Imitatio Dei* or holiness, as suggested by the Rabbinic literature, it must be remarked that the Hebrew term *Kedushah* does not quite cover our term "holiness," the mystical and higher aspect of it being better represented by the Hebrew term *Chasiduth* (saintliness), for which *Kedushah* is only one of the preparatory virtues<sup>4</sup>; though the two ideas are so naturally allied that they are not always separated in Rabbinical texts. I shall, nevertheless, in the following pages classify my remarks under the two headings of *Kedushah* and *Chasiduth*. The former moves more within the limits of the Law, though occasionally overleaping it, whilst the latter, aspiring to a superior kind of holiness, not only supplements the Law but also proves a certain corrective to it.

As we have seen, holiness, according to Abba Saul, is identical with Imitation of God. The nature of this Imitation is defined by him thus: "*I and He*, that is like unto him (God). As he is merciful and gracious, so be

<sup>1</sup> *Tanchuma*, קדושים, § 5. Cp. also *Pesikta*, ed. Buber, 16 a.

<sup>2</sup> *Tanchuma*, *ibid.*, § 2.

<sup>3</sup> See *Lev. Rabbah*, xxiv. 4.

<sup>4</sup> See *T. B. Abodah Zarah*, 20 b, and ר"ט to the passages. All the parables, however (given by Bacher in his *Agada der Tannaiten*, II, p. 796, note 5. p. 460, to which *Midrash Mishle*, XV, is also to be added), have חסידות close to קדושה.

thou (man) merciful and gracious<sup>1</sup>." The scriptural phrases "walking in the ways of God" (Deut. xi. 22), and "being called by the name of God" (Joel iii. 5), are again explained to mean: "As God is called merciful and gracious, so be thou merciful and gracious; as God is called righteous, so be thou righteous; as God is called holy, so be thou holy<sup>2</sup>." "The profession of the holy one, blessed be he, is charity and lovingkindness, and Abraham, who will command his children and his household after him 'that they shall keep the way of the Lord' (Gen. xviii. 19), is told by God: 'Thou hast chosen my profession; wherefore thou shalt also become like unto me, an ancient of days<sup>3</sup>.'" The Imitation receives practical shape in the following passage: "The members of the house of Israel are in duty bound to deal with one another mercifully, to do charity (*Mizwah*), and to practise kindness. For the holy one, blessed be he, has only created this world with loving-kindness and mercy, and it rests with us to learn from the ways of God." Thus said R. Chama b. Chanina, "... Walk in the attributes of God (or rather, make his attributes the rule for thy conduct). As he clothes the naked (Gen. iii. 21), so do thou clothe the naked; as he nurses the sick (Gen. xviii. 1), so do thou nurse the sick; as he comforts the mourners (Gen. xxv. 11), so do thou comfort the mourners; as he buries the dead (Deut. xxxiv. 5), so do thou bury the dead<sup>4</sup>." Again, when R. Judah b. Ilai interrupted his lectures in order to join the bridal procession, he used to address his disciples with the words: "My

<sup>1</sup> *Mechilta*, 37 a, and *T. B. Sabbath*, 133 a, and parallels. The interpretation of Abba Saul is based on the word *ואני* in Exod. xv. 2, which he divides into *אני* and *הוא*, meaning "I (man) and he (God)."

<sup>2</sup> *Sifra*, 85 a. It seems that the Rabbis read in Joel *קרא*.

<sup>3</sup> See *Gen. Rabbah*, lviii, § 9.

<sup>4</sup> *T. B. Sotah*, 14 a. The beginning of the passage is taken from the *שאלות פ' בראשית*. According to the Agadic explanations Abraham was in an invalid state when God appeared to him in the plains of Mamre. The blessing, again spoken of in Gen. xxv. 11, which took place after the death of Abraham, was meant as a message of condolence.

children! rise and show your respect to the bride (by joining the procession), for so we find that the holy one, blessed be he, acted as best man to Eve<sup>1</sup>." The Imitation is further extended to mere good manners, in which God is also taken as a model. As, for instance, when we are told by the Rabbis: "Let man learn proper behaviour from the Omnipresent, who, though knowing the absence of righteous men from Sodom and Gomorrah, did not interrupt Abraham in his intercession for these cities, but waited until he finished his pleading, and even took leave before parting from him<sup>2</sup>."

It is to be remarked that this God-likeness is confined to his manifestations of mercy and righteousness, the Rabbis rarely desiring the Jew to take God as a model in his attributes of severity and rigid justice, though the Bible could have furnished them with many instances of this latter kind. Interesting in this connexion is the way in which the commandment of the Imitation was codified by some of the later authorities: "The holy one, blessed be he, ordained that man should cleave to his ways, as it is written, 'Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave' (Deut. x. 19). But how can man cleave to the *Shechinah*? Is it not written, 'For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, a jealous God'? (Deut. iv. 24). But cleave to his ways: as God nurses the sick, so do thou nurse the sick, and so forth<sup>3</sup>." The feature of jealousy is thus quite ignored, whilst the attributes of mercy and graciousness become man's law. The prophet Elijah, who said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts" (1 Kings xix. 10), and even repeated his denunciation of Israel (*ibid.* ver. 14), was, according to the

<sup>1</sup> See *Aboth d. R. Nathan*, c. iv. The words "And he brought unto the man" (Gen. ii. 23) are understood by the Rabbis that God took particular care to represent Eve to Adam in the adorned state of a bride.

<sup>2</sup> See *דרכי ארץ רבה*, c. v. I supplemented the passage with the parallel in *Aboth d. R. Nathan*, c. xxxvii.

<sup>3</sup> *ספר יראים*, § 3.

Rabbis, rebuked by God, who answered him, "Thou art always jealous," and was removed from his prophetic office, Elisha being appointed prophet in his room<sup>1</sup>.

The second or negative aspect of holiness is implied by the Hebrew word *Kedushah*, the original meaning of which seems to be "separation" and "withdrawal"<sup>2</sup>. So the Rabbis paraphrase the verse, "Sanctify yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. xi. 44), with the words, "As I am separated, so be ye separated"<sup>3</sup>. By the separatedness of God is not meant any metaphysical remoteness, but merely aloofness and withdrawal from things impure and defiling as incompatible with God's holiness, whence Israel should also be removed from everything impure and defiling.

Foremost among the things impure, which range very widely, are: idolatry, adultery, and shedding of blood. To these three cardinal sins the term *Tumah* (defilement) is especially applied<sup>4</sup>. The defiling nature of the second (including all sexual immorality) is particularly dwelt upon in the Rabbinic literature. Thus the Rabbis interpret the verse, "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. xix. 6), with the words, "Be unto me a kingdom of priests, separated from the nations of the world and their abominations"<sup>5</sup>. This passage must be taken in connexion with another, in which, with allusion to the scriptural words, "And ye shall be holy unto me . . . and I have severed you from other people

<sup>1</sup> See חורא"י, c. viii, and *Yalkut Shimoni*, II, § 217. Cp. also *Rabbah* to Canticles i. 6. *Agadath Shir Hashirim*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> See Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*, p. 140, about the uncertainty of the original meaning of the word.

<sup>3</sup> *Sifra*, 57 b. Cp. 86 c.

<sup>4</sup> See *Moreh Nebuchim*, III, 47. Maimonides' explanation was undoubtedly suggested to him by *Sifra*, 81 a (to Lev. xvi. 16).

<sup>5</sup> *Mechilta*, 63 a. A few lines before there is given another explanation to the words קדוש וגוי, which was taken by the great master of the Agada, Lector Friedmann, to contain a protest against proselytizing. The text, however, seems to be corrupt, and reads in the *Midrash Haggadol* יכול כלבים ובעלי מלחמה ח"ל כלבים או כלבים יכול בשלבים כענין שנ' וגוי דור כלבים היו ח"ל וגוי קדוש.

that you should be mine" (Lev. xx. 26), the Rabbis point to the sexual immorality which divides the heathen world from Israel<sup>1</sup>. In fact, all such incontinence was called *Tumah* (impurity), indulgence in which disqualifies (or cuts man off) from God; God says, "what joy can I have in him?"<sup>2</sup> but he who surrounds himself with a fence against anything unchaste is called holy<sup>3</sup>, and he "who shutteth his eyes from seeing evil (in the sense of immorality) is worthy of receiving the very presence of the *Shechinah*"<sup>4</sup>.

The notion of impurity is further extended to all things stigmatized in the Levitical legislation as unclean, particularly to the forbidden foods "which make the soul abominable." The observance of these laws the Rabbis seem to consider as a special privilege of Israel, marking the great distinction between them and the "descendants of Noah"<sup>5</sup>, whilst in the transgression of them they saw the open door leading to idolatry; in a word, to a deeper degree of impurity<sup>6</sup>.

The soul is also made abominable—and hence impure—according to the Rabbis, by doing anything which is calculated to provoke disgust, as for instance, by eating from unclean plates or taking one's food with filthy hands<sup>7</sup>. In fact, to do anything which might have a sickening effect upon others is ranked among the hidden sins which "God shall bring into judgment"<sup>8</sup>; but he who is careful to refrain from things filthy and repulsive brings upon himself a particular holiness purifying his soul for the

<sup>1</sup> *Sifra*, 93 b.

<sup>2</sup> *Sifra*, 86 d.

<sup>3</sup> *Lev. Rabbah*, xxiv. 6.

<sup>4</sup> See *Lev. Rabbah*, xxiii. end.

<sup>5</sup> See *Exod. Rabbah*, xxx. 9, about the end.

<sup>6</sup> This seems to me to be the meaning of the words in *ירך ארץ ויבא*, III, "ואם טמאים אחם בהם סופכם ליטמא בהם", *Sifra*, 57 b, and comp. the *פרוש דראב"ו*. The other explanation given there suggests our passage to be a parallel to that quoted in the preceding note from the *רא"י*. Perhaps we should read in the *Sifra*, *סופכם ליטמא בע"ז*.

<sup>7</sup> See *T. B. Makkoth*, 16 b, and Maimonides, *הלכות מאכלות אסורות*, § xvii, the last five *הלכות*.

<sup>8</sup> See *T. B. Chagigah*, 5 a, the explanation of *Rab* to *Eccles. xii. 14*.

sake of the holy one; as it is said, "Ye shall sanctify yourselves<sup>1</sup>."

Lastly, we have to record here that view which extends the notion of impurity to every transgression of Biblical law. Every transgression has the effect of stupefying the heart<sup>2</sup>, whilst the observance of the laws in the Torah is productive of an additional holiness<sup>3</sup>. According to this view, all the commandments, negative and affirmative, have to be considered as so many lessons in discipline, which if only as an education in obedience, result in establishing that communion between man and God which is the crowning reward of holiness. Thus the Rabbis say, with allusion to the verse "That ye may remember and do all my commandments and be holy unto your God" (Num. xv. 40), "Heart and eyes are the two middlemen of sin to the body, leading him astray. The matter is to be compared to a man drowning in water, to whom the shipmaster threw out a cord, saying unto him, Hold fast to this cord, for if thou permit it to escape thee there is no life for thee. Likewise the holy one, blessed be he, said to Israel, 'As long as you cling to my laws, you cleave unto the Lord your God (which means life) . . . Be holy, for as long as you fulfil my commandments ye are sanctified, but if you neglect them you will become profaned<sup>4</sup>.'"

Thus far holiness still moves within the limits of the Law, the obedience to which sanctifies man, and the rebellion against which defiles. There is, however, another superior kind of holiness which rises above the Law, and which, as already indicated in the opening remarks of this Essay, should be more correctly termed *Chasiduth* (saint-

<sup>1</sup> Maimonides, *ibid.* Cp. *T. B. Berachoth*, 53 b, the last lines of the page.

<sup>2</sup> See *T. B. Yoma*, 39 a, חני רבי ר' שמעאל עבירה, &c. By עבירה in this passage is meant the transgression of any law.

<sup>3</sup> See *Mechilta*, 98 a, and *Sifra*, 35 a and 91 d, קדושה כל המצות. The *Midrash Haggadol* also seems to read in *Sifra* (to Lev. xi. 44) והתקדשם זו קדושה מצות; והתקדשם זו קדושה מצות (to Lev. xi. 44) והתקדשם זו קדושה מצות; a reading which is confirmed by Maimonides when he says (*Moreh Nebuchim*, iii. 33 and 47), אמנם אמרו יחלה והתקדשם . . . לשון ספרא זו קדושה מצות.

<sup>4</sup> *Numbers Rabbah*, xvii. 6.



liness). The characteristic of the Chasid, as it is somewhere pointed out, is that he does not wait for a distinct commandment. He endeavours to be pleasant to his Maker, and like a good son studies his father's will, inferring from the explicit wishes of the father the direction in which he is likely to give him joy<sup>1</sup>. Hence the tendency of the Chasid to devote himself with more zeal and self-sacrifice to one law or group of laws than to others; just according to the particular bend of his mind, and his individual conception of the will of his father. Thus Rab Judah perceives the "things of *Chasiduth*" in paying particular attention to the tractates *Nezikin* (Damages, including the laws regarding the returning of lost goods, prohibition of usury, &c.), and in avoiding anything which might result in doing injury to a fellow man. Raba again defines *Chasiduth* as carrying out the prescriptions in the tractate of Aboth; a tractate, be it observed, in which the ritual element is quite absent, as it is limited to the moral sayings and spiritual counsels given by the ancient Jewish authorities. Another (anonymous) author thinks that *Chasiduth* consists in closely observing the laws prescribed in the (liturgical) tractate *Berachoth* (Benedictions), prayer and thanksgiving having been probably the particular passion of this Rabbi<sup>2</sup>.

The principle of *Chasiduth* is perhaps best summarized by the Talmudic formula: "Sanctify thyself even in that which is permitted to thee<sup>3</sup>." R. Eleazar, of Worms, who takes this saying as the motto to one of his chapters on the *Regulations of Chasiduth*, comments upon it: "Sanctify thyself and thy thoughts, reflect upon the Unity (of God, and think of) whom thou art serving, who (it is that) observes thee, who it is that) knows thy deeds, and who (it is) to whom thou

<sup>1</sup> See מציאת ישירים.

<sup>2</sup> See *Baba Kama*, 30 a, text and commentaries, especially the ר"ר to their corresponding place in the רב אלפס. For the ten things of the *Chasiduth* which Rab is said to have observed (mixture of the ceremonial and the moral) see *Yuchasin*, ed. Filipowski, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> *T. B. Jebamoth*, 20 a.

wilt return . . . Hence be (in ritual questions) stringent with thyself and lenient towards others . . . The Torah in certain cases made concessions to the weakness of the flesh (hence the law cannot always be taken as the supreme standard of conduct). Take no oath even for the truth . . . Keep thee from every wicked thing (Deut. xxiii. 11), which means, among others, not to think even of things impure, &c. &c.<sup>1</sup> Impure thinking was, in the Rabbinic view, the antecedent to impure doing, and the ideal saint was as pure of heart as of hand, acting no impurity and thinking none.

Very expressive is Nachmanides, whose comments on the injunction of separatedness—"As I am separated so be ye separated"—are to the following effect:

According to my opinion, by the Talmudical term פרישות, *separatedness*, is not meant the abstaining from *Arayoth* (sexual intercourse forbidden in the Bible), but something which gives to those who practise it the name of Perushim. The matter (is thus): The Torah has forbidden *Arayoth* as well as certain kinds of food, but allowed intercourse between man and his wife as well as the eating of meat and the drinking of wine. But even within these limits can the man of (impure) appetites be drenched in lusts, become a drunkard and a glutton, as well as use impure language, since there is no (distinct) prohibition against these things in the Torah. A man could thus be the worst libertine with the very licence of the Torah. Therefore the scripture, after giving in detail the things forbidden absolutely, concluded with a general law (of holiness), to show that we must also abstain from things superfluous. As for instance, that even permitted sexual intercourse should be submitted to restrictions (of holiness), preserving it against degenerating into mere animal lust; that the drinking of wine should be reduced to a minimum, the Nazir being called holy because he abstains from drink,

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the מרחק.

and that one should guard one's mouth and tongue against being defiled by gluttony and vile language. Man should indeed endeavour to reach a similar degree of holiness to R. Chiya, who never uttered an idle word in his life . . . The scripture warns us to be clean, pure, and separated from the crowd of men who taint themselves by luxuries and ugliness<sup>1</sup>.

It will be observed that this correction of the Law is not considered by Nachmanides as a new revelation : according to him it is implied by the general scriptural rule of holiness, which, of course, considering the undefinable nature of holiness can be extended to any length. Nor were the Rabbis conscious of any innovation in or addition to the Torah when they promulgated the principle of sanctifying oneself by refraining even from things permitted ; a principle which can be and was applied both to matters ritual as well as to morals and conduct<sup>2</sup>. As it would seem they simply looked upon it as a mere "fence" preventing man from breaking through the limits drawn by the Torah itself. Very instructive in this respect is the conversation which the Talmud puts in the mouth of King David and his friend Hushai the Archite. When David was fleeing before his rebellious son Absalom, he is reported to have been asked by Hushai, "Why hast thou married a captured woman?" For it is supposed by the Rabbis that Absalom's mother Maacah (2 Sam. iii. 3) was a woman taken captive in the war. Hushai thus accounts for the misfortune which has befallen David by this unhappy marriage. But David answers him, "Has not the merciful allowed such a marriage?" (Deut. xxi. 10-13), whereupon Hushai rejoins: "Why didst thou not study the order of the scripture in that place?" In other words the fact that the regulations regarding the woman taken captive in war are closely followed by the law concerning

<sup>1</sup> Commentary to the Pentateuch, Lev. xix. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See רוקק, *ibid.*, where he deducts from it both certain stringent rules regarding forbidden food, as well as others teaching morality.

the stubborn and rebellious son (Deut. xxi. 18-21), indicates that the Torah, though not absolutely forbidding it, did not wholly approve of such a marriage, but foretold that its offspring was likely to prove a source of misery to his parents<sup>1</sup>. The correction of the Law, for neglecting which David is so terribly punished, is thus effected, not by something antagonistic to or outside of it, but by its own proper interpretation and expansion. As another instance of this kind I quote the following, which, rendered in the old Rabbinic style, would run thus: "We have heard that it is written, 'Thou shalt not kill' (Exod. xx. 13). We should then think that the prohibition is confined to actual murder. But there are also other kinds of shedding blood, as, for instance, to put a man to shame in public, which causes his blood to leave his face. Hence to cause this feeling is as bad as murder, whence he who is guilty of it loses his share in the world to come<sup>2</sup>. Again, we have heard that it is written, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' (Exod. xx. 14). But the phrase in Job (xxiv. 15), 'The *eye* also of the adulterer waiteth for twilight,' teaches us that an unchaste look is also to be considered as adultery; and the verse, 'And that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye used to go a whoring' (Num. xv. 39), teaches that an unchaste look or even an unchaste thought are also to be regarded as adultery<sup>3</sup>."

The crowning reward of *Kedushah*, or rather *Chasiduth*, is, as already indicated, communion with the Holy Spirit, "Chasiduth leading to the Holy Spirit," or, as it is expressed in another place, "Holiness means nothing else than pro-

<sup>1</sup> See *T. B. Sanhedrin*, 107 a.

<sup>2</sup> See *T. B. Baba Mezia*, 59 a.

<sup>3</sup> See *Lev. Rabbah*, xxiii. Cp. *Pesikta Rabbathi*, 124 b, text and notes. See also *Midrash Haggadol* . . . ולא בנין ולא בלב . . . ר"א לא הנאף שלא ינאף . . . ולא בנין ולא בלב . . . ומנין שהעין חולב מונין וכו' ולא חתרו אחרי לבבם ואחרי עיניהם. Cp. also New Testament, Matt. v. 21 and 27. I suspect that the expression in the N. T., "Ye have heard," had originally something to do with the Talmudic formula *שמעו איני* . . . ה"ל, or *לא שמעו* . . . אלא . . . ה"ל, or *בשמע* . . . ה"ל (see *Mechilta*, 81 b, 82 b, and 84 a).

phesy<sup>1</sup>." This superior holiness, which implies absolute purity both in action and thought, and utter withdrawal from things earthly, begins, as a later mystic rightly points out, with a human effort on the part of man to reach it, and finishes with a gift from heaven bestowed upon man by an act of grace<sup>2</sup>. The Talmud expresses the same thought when we read, "If man sanctifies himself a little, they (in heaven) sanctify him much, if man sanctifies himself below (on earth), they bestow upon him (more) holiness from above<sup>3</sup>." "Everything is in need of help (from heaven)<sup>4</sup>. Even the Torah, which is called pure and holy, has only this sanctifying effect, when man has divested himself from every thought of pride, when he has purified himself from any consideration of gold and silver, when he is indeed quite pure from sin<sup>5</sup>." Only Torah with holiness can bring about communion with God. Thus runs a prayer, or rather prophecy, by an ancient Rabbi: "Learn with all thy heart and all thy soul to know my ways, and to watch the gates of my Torah. Preserve my Torah in thy heart, and may my fear be present before thy eyes. Guard thy mouth against all sin, and make thyself holy against all sin and injustice, and I will be with thee<sup>6</sup>." Hence the prayer which so often occurs in the Jewish liturgy, "Sanctify ourselves by thy commandments,"—for any thought of pride or any worldly consideration is liable to undo the sanctifying effect of the performance of any divine law.

S. SCHECHTER.

<sup>1</sup> 'ואת הקדוש והקריב אין קדושה אלא נבואה שנאמר אין קדוש כה'. *Midrash in MS.*

<sup>2</sup> ענין הקדושה . . . תחלתו הטהרות וסופו מחנה, ch. xxvi, כסילת ישרים.

<sup>3</sup> *T. B. Yoma*, 39 a.

<sup>4</sup> *Midrash to Ps. xx.* Cp. *Tanchuma*, קדושים, § 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Midrash MS.* in ס' יהיר.

<sup>6</sup> *T. B. Berachoth*, 17 a. See also ס' 17 to the passage.